Coast Guard Institute
Campus News

www.uscg.mil/hq/cgi

YN3 Alfonso Ramirez takes a break from scanning correspondence course answer sheets to correct errors on a submitted form. The Institute's scan system is extremely sensitive and rejects improperly prepared forms. Common errors on these forms include bubbles not properly filled, missing information, forms filled out with other than a No. 2 pencil and closed enrollments. A little attention to these forms before they're submitted will make the process smoother and less time consuming, and allow the Institute's staff to better respond to ESO's inquiries.

Defunct college not eligible for TA

An organization by the name of Computer Learning Centers has suspended operations. Tuition assistance will not be processed for that organization.

Charter Oak policy change

Effective immediately, Charter Oak will accept the ACE recommended passing score of 420 for the CLEP general exams.

College fees

Reduced fee schedules for Excelsior College's associate in applied science and associate in occupational science degrees are now posted on the Institute's web site, www.uscg.mil/hq/cgi.

Enrollment forms on web

Enrollment forms for the four external degree institutions for which the Institute does degree planning are available on the Institute web site, www.uscg.mil/hq/cgi; click on Voluntary education, then on College enrollment.

ESO workshop set for August in Oklahoma City

Serious consideration was give to not having an ESO workshop this year because of budget and resource issues. However, because of the turnover in ESOs, it is to everyone's benefit to provide the support. Additionally, the Institute has received numerous requests from Coast Guard units to hold the workshop.

Oklahoma City's Biltmore Hotel will be the site of this year's ESO Workshop. Hotel room cost is $65 (not including taxes). Room reservations may be made by calling the hotel, (405) 947-7681. The deadline for making reservations is Aug. 17. No registration fee will be charged. The workshop will be held Aug. 27 through 29. Commands desiring to send their ESOs will be required to pay the travel and per diem costs.

A tentative agenda will be released in June and posted on the Institute's homepage. Programs to be addressed are Educational Assessments, Degree Plans, Transcripts, Tuition Assistance, Foundation Grant, ACE Review Process, DANTES Examination Program, External Degree Programs, Independent Study Courses, Audio/Video Course Library and Coast Guard Correspondence Courses.

From the commanding officer...

By LT Brad Wilson
Coast Guard Institute commanding officer

"Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain…" The great and powerful Wizard of Oz warned the four trembling visitors standing in awe.

Come to find out the great and powerful wizard was nothing more than one person throwing levers and switches to make the big intimidating production work. Toto had just wondered over to the control room curtain and exposed what was really going on.

The Coast Guard Institute is a little like the Emerald City I suppose. We have a big facade, high recognition and do a lot of stuff, but in reality we're only a few dedicated workers making the big production work. I want to throw back our curtain a little and try to give you a peek at what the Institute is really like.

Our home page shows a photo of the large three-story building we're located in at Oklahoma City's FAA aeronautical center. Impressive? Maybe, but the Institute only uses a quarter of one floor in the building, or about 11 office spaces. Years ago there were roughly 126 members assigned to the Institute, now we have 20 active-duty and nine civilian employees.

We have four main divisions: Information Resources, Production, Student Services and Voluntary Education.

Information Resources is a shop of five people. They manage and process the huge database that keeps all of your education accomplishments in order. One petty officer keeps all of our workstations up and running, and three civilian employees process incoming transactions and test results every day. There are over 35,000 records maintained and hundreds of new entries processed everyday! We have one petty officer maintaining our web site to ensure it is current and useful. (By the way, our Institute web site is one of the Coast Guard's most looked at websites, and is chocked full of useful voluntary education and advancement information! It's certainly worth visiting the site, whether you're pursuing higher education or simply looking to advance in the Coast Guard.)

Production is more of an 'in house' department. There are three members who work with training center course writers, ensuring all of our course materials remain updated. Three others operate our bookroom/warehouse. They print material, organize course packages and sort the bins of mail that arrive five days a week. When you order a course, the form finds it's way downstairs to our book room. They pull your material off the warehouse shelves, stuff it into an envelope find your mail label and ship it out.

Student Services is staffed with nine people. Since LTJGs/CWOs/and E8s don't do much phone watch duty, three petty officers take care of the hundreds of ESOs who phone in their questions and problems. They also process the "daily run," which involves opening the mail packages, sorting requests and tests, scanning hundreds of answer sheets and request forms, plus pulling, sorting and mailing all the end-of-course tests. The senior members produce manuals, develop procedures and process investigations for lost exams and missing materials. Busy day, huh?

Voluntary Education could best be described as the mule team pulling a very large plow (with dull blades- and pulling it up hill, against the wind). Tired and sweaty, sore and hungry … just looking for a shade tree and some oats. This dedicated team is working hard to provide you with an education assessment, a degree plan for college, tuition assistance funds or a Coast Guard transcript.

When VE was developed five years ago, it consisted of two people and about four dozen customers. Now we process more than 3,000 assessments a year with only one extra person added for the increased workload! There also is a YNC who processes tuition assistance payments for the entire Coast Guard, (a job that used to be done by dozens of collateral duty folks in the field). Another person processes all the Coast Guard transcripts, now accepted by universities across the nation. Plus there's only one petty officer who sorts and scans all the incoming education packages, electronically enters all new student data into the system database and mails out every finished degree plan.

Like every commanding officer in the Coast Guard, I am very proud of my unit and the great work these dedicated crewmembers produce every day. Our 'Emerald City' may look large and populous, but there are really only a few of us throwing the levers and switches to make the correspondence course and large voluntary education programs work. Next time you call us and get a busy signal, or your degree plan takes a few extra weeks to return, try to understand we're either working hard out here on the prairie, or trying to dodge the tornadoes.

Tuition assistance top-up

GI Bill can pay member's share when using tuition assistance

(Extracted from VA Circular 22-01 dated Feb. 1)

Public Law 106-398 authorized the Veterans Administration to pay the 25 percent of tuition for voluntary education courses that is not paid through tuition assistance. This program is known as Tuition Assistance Top-up or Top-off.

To be eligible applicants must meet two requirements:

■ Eligible to receive Chapter 30 (Montgomery GI Bill) benefits. This means that a person must meet the chapter 30 basic eligibility requirements and be either a veteran or have served at least 24 months if still on active duty.

■ Receive tuition assistance from the military (Coast Guard). Applicants must receive TA from their military component for the course or courses for which they're claiming Top-up. Any course for which TA is approved by the Coast Guard Institute is approved for Top-up payments.

The effective date for the provisions of this law is Oct. 30, 2000. The Tuition Assistance Top-up benefit is available for terms that begin on or after Oct. 30, 2000. The Top-up program is not available to reservists who are covered by Chapter 1606. Tuition Assistance Top-up is not additional tuition assistance. It is a Chapter 30 benefit. The payment is made to the individual claimant, not to the institution. It is made in one lump-sum payment.

Limits

The Top-up benefit is payable for 36 months of courses. This is separate from months of basic entitlement to chapter 30 benefit payments.

Chapter 30 basic months of entitlement are not affected by Top-up payments. Top-up "entitlement" is not adjusted by training time. If Top-up payment is made for a course, the Top-up entitlement is reduced by the length of the course regardless of how

DANTES adds colleges to its external degree catalog

The following colleges and universities have been added to DANTES External Degree Catalog. The catalog, which most ESOs have available, lists credit-bearing certificate, undergraduate and graduate external degree programs selected to meet the needs of military students.

Regionally accredited institutions
■ Champlain College
■ Duquesne University
■ Fort Hays State University
■ Herkimer County Community College
■ Montana State University
■ Peirce College
■ Seton Hall University
■ Southern Christian University
■ St. Leo University
■ University of North Dakota
■ University of Northern Iowa

Nationally accredited institutions
■ American Bible College and Seminary
■ American Institute for Computer Sciences
■ American Institute of Paralegal Studies
■ Crown College
■ ISIM University
■ Professional Career Development Institute
■ University of Leicester

DANTES External Degree Catalog lists the following guidelines for those pursuing distance education:

External degree programs listed in the catalog have minimal or no residency requirements. Many programs may be entered at any time of the year. These programs may incorporate:
•Off-campus directed study
•Correspondence study
•Electronically delivered courses
•Experiential learning
•Credit-by-examination
•ACE Guide credit

All programs emphasize flexibility and require the student to assume personal responsibility for learning. Nearly all the programs are offered without a requirement for any on-campus time. They offer great flexibility for use at home, or on the road.

Some institutions impose certain requirements prior to acceptance of credit awarded for job experiences, credit from testing, or independent study credit. Determine the degree requirements of the institution before enrolling. The institution's catalog lists both general admission requirements and prerequisites

Rating Updates

New courses

Incident Command System I-200 Course and end-of-course test (ICS I-200, 0591-1) was in final processing at the Institute in April and went on line before May.

Still waiting approval to release Introductory Senior Marine Inspector Course and EOCT (ISMIC, 0830-1), Senior Hull Inspector course and EOCT (SHIC, 0831-1) and Senior Machinery Inspector Course and EOCT (SMIC, 0832-1).

Obsolete courses

Piloting & Dead Reckoning Course (PELNAV, 0416-4) was taken off-line March 7. Course EOCTs can be taken until Aug. 1, after which they will become obsolete.

Watch Standing Conning Officer Course (CONOFF, 0430-1) was taken off line March 7. Course EOCTs can be taken until Aug. 1, after which they will become obsolete.

Celestial Navigation Course (CELNAV, 0463-5) was taken off-line March 7. Course EOCTs can be taken until Aug. 1, after which they will become obsolete.

Elementary Algebra Course (ELALG, 0486-1) was taken off line Oct. 30. The course became obsolete April 1. No replacement for this course is planned.

Basic Math Course (BAMATH, 0485-1) was taken off-line Jan. 10. Course EOCTs can be taken until Aug. 1, after which they become obsolete. No replacement for this course is planned. This course is still available on the Institute's web site, www.uscg.mil/hq/cgi.

QM Striker Course (QMSTRK, 0300-2) was taken off-line Nov. 28. EOCTs can be taken until May 1, when they will become obsolete. No replacement for this course is planned.

EOCT edition changes

BM1 (0109-8) new series 54, 55 & 56 is being processed at the Institute and planned to be on-line April 30. EOCT series 51, 52 & 53 is scheduled to become obsolete July 1.

NAVRUL (0469-4) new series 57, 58 and 59 is being processed at the Institute and is expected to be on line April 20. EOCT series 54, 55 and 56 is scheduled to become obsolete July 1.

Other

The Institute is out of stock of Maritime law enforcement VHS tapes. We are working with the force manager to replenish the inventory. No date has been set when they will become available.

Status of courses and end-of-course tests

Please update your List of Correspondence Courses, Education Services Officer Procedures VOL.II

Course Title	Course Code	Ed. No.	Course Obsolete date	EOCT Obsolete date	Replace/New Course/Ed.	New/Replace EOCT series	Effective Date
ICS I-200	0591	1	N/A	N/A	0591-1	51, 52, 53	27 Apr 01
ISMIC	0830	1	N/A	N/A	0830-1	51, 52, 53	UNKWN
SHIC	0831	1	N/A	N/A	0831-1	51, 52, 53	UNKWN
SMIC	0832	1	N/A	N/A	0832-1	51, 52, 53	UNKWN
PELNAV	0416	4	7 Mar 01	1 Aug 01	None - Material in QM1 (0137-5)		
CONOFF	0430	1	7 Mar 01	1 Aug 01	None - Material in QM1 (0137-5)		
CELNAV	0463	5	7 Mar 01	Compromised	None - Material in QM1 (0137-5)		
ELALG	0486	1	30 Oct 00	1 Apr 01	None	None	N/A
BAMATH	0485	1	10 Jan 01	1 Aug 01	None	None	N/A
QMSTRK	0300	2	28 Nov 00	1 May 01	None	None	N/A
BM1	0109	8	N/A	1 Jul 01	N/A	54, 55, 56	30 Apr 01
NAVRUL	0469	4	N/A	1 Jul 01	N/A	57, 58, 59	30 Apr 01

Other:

ESOs: Please pay particular attention when enrolling members into classified RD and FT courses. These courses are only processed for personnel who have a need-to-know and possess a proper security clearance to receive the courses. Examples: TCs and QMs cannot order an RD course, and GMs and ETs cannot order an FT course.

Maritime law enforcement VHS tapes. The Institute currently is out of stock of these videos and is working with the force manager to replenish our inventory. No date has been set when they will become available.

Career Development News

by GMC Larry Tankersley
Institute career development adviser

Tuition Assistance is once again in the news. There are some exciting changes taking place that will affect anyone wanting to pursue personal or professional growth. The Defense Department has been working to improve their TA program for a long time, and we are heading in the same direction. Most significantly is the effort currently underway to find ways to make the program available to more individuals. Our ability to request additional funds and raise the spending caps is directly related to our participation percentage. It is difficult to justify more money when only a fraction of the eligible personnel are using the program. Traditionally the participation rate has been about 4 to 6 percent of enlisted and 10 to 12 percent of officers.

The other recent change has to do with administration of the TA program. We know how important it is to get the authorizations to you quickly so you can register for class. The average turnaround time is less than the 10 working days required by COMDINST. We are enforcing the 10-day requirement, and you will see your request rejected if it does not arrive at the Institute at least 10 days before the beginning of class. There has been some confusion on this issue, so I will try and explain in some detail.

Several different references have been sent out over the last couple of years explaining the submission deadline, and each was worded a little differently. One refers to the class registration deadline, another requires the submission 10 days prior to class start date, and still another refers to the date required by the school.

Each of these references was an attempt to emphasize how important it was to submit your request in time for the Institute to process it and provide an authorization form that would be accepted by the school.

Obviously each school is going to be different and there is no one policy that will cover every circumstance. The bottom line is we have to have a policy so that we are not inundated with last-minute requests. Every time we have to expedite a request for someone who waits until the last minute, someone else's request is delayed.

There are always going to be exceptions, and we are prepared to handle them when the reason is operational (or personal hardship) and endorsed by the command. Otherwise we expect that you will get the request to us at least 10 working days before class starts.

What we have done to be more flexible is to examine the school policy allowing students to pay fees after the class starts. If your institution has such a provision you should provide documentation showing the actual date that payment must be received. Photocopying a section out of the school catalog showing the policy, or obtaining a letter from the registrar stating that late submission is acceptable and a deadline date is acceptable.

ESOs may obtain this information from the institution on behalf of all members and we will retain it on file for future reference.

If there is a personal hardship or operational commitment that prevents you from submitting your request in time, include a letter from your command explaining the circumstances. We will process the request as received and will work with you to get the authorization to the school. It is always an option to cancel a class for which you have received an authorization or to make changes to the classes authorized. It is not always possible to convince the business office at a college to accept payment after the deadline. Go ahead and look at your schedule for the upcoming season and see if you can take a class. If so, submit the request now, then, as time to register nears, you can make any changes needed to the authorization form. As long as the change does not involve additional cost, you can make the changes yourself or cancel an authorization all together. Just make sure to send the changes to NETPTDC, which is the same place you must submit your grades.

One final thought. Right now we have an eight-week backlog on assessments and updates. This is only going to get worse as we experience personnel changes and losses. Please be patient and realize that there are only one or two people handling a customer base of more than 45,000. We cannot possibly keep up with all these requests and spend all day answering phone calls and e-mails from people who have not first worked with their ESOs and CDAs to solve problems and answer questions. We very much want to have that personal contact and see the results of our hard work but simply cannot do both.

Important information:

Coast Guard Institute:
www.uscg.mil/hq/cgi
Career development advisers:
www.uscg.mil/hq/g-w/g-wt/g-wtl/cis/cispers.htm

much the Top-up payment is. For example, if the course is three months long, the Top-up entitlement charge is three months, whether the amount of payment is $1,950 or 450. The claimant would, however, still have 36 months of entitlement for "regular" chapter 30 benefits.

MGIB rate reduction: If TA Top-up has been paid, the full-time monthly rate of MGIB benefits to which the individual would normally be entitled is subsequently reduced by the amount of the total Top-up payment divided by 36. For example, if a person who would normally be entitled to a full-time rate of $650 per month had received a total of $3,600 in Top-up benefits, the person's full-time monthly rate would be reduced by $100 per month to $550 for subsequent enrollments, whether as an in-service or veteran claimant.

Previous duplication of benefit provisions still apply to TA and MGIB benefits. A person cannot receive "normal" MGIB monthly benefits for the same course for which TA is received. Therefore, the VA cannot award MGIB benefits and pay Tuition Assistance Top-up for the same course.

Application procedures

Original claims: Top-up can be paid only to people who are eligible to receive chapter 30 benefits.

Students who have not previously filed a claim for MGIB should do the following:
• Request TA from the CG Institute. Submit CG Form 4147 via the Education Services Officer at least three weeks prior to the start date of the class.
• File the TA approval form along with their VA Form 22-1990. This form is available from the VA web site at www.vba.va.gov/pubs/educationforms.htm.
• Indicate Top-up on the 22-1990 in item 1A under the MGIB-Active Duty block.

Students who have previously filed a claim for MGIB should simply submit their signed TA approval form.

VEAP conversions
• *You have until Oct. 31 to make the election.*
• *You have 18 months from the date of your election to pay $2,700.*
• *You may not receive MGIB benefits until you make the full $2,700 payment.*

You can't receive VEAP benefits once you make an election and you can't receive MGIB until you pay the $2,700. Therefore, you need to carefully time your election and payment of $2,700 to avoid a lapse in benefits.

Application process
• *Complete DD Form 2366.*
• *Complete VA Form 24-5281 (must currently have monies on deposit in the VEAP program).*
• *Complete HRSIC Form 2041 or provide a check or money order to pay the $2,700 enrollment fee.*

All elections must be made by Oct. 31. Members electing MGIB coverage must make a nonrefundable payroll deduction or lump sum payment of $2,700 within 18 months after completing the DD Form 2366.

Common tuition assistance application errors

Nearly 40 percent of the TA request forms the Institute receives contain errors, errors that slow processing of these requests. Most of the problems applicants encounter with the form are with block 11, ENROLLMENT INFORMATION. *Below is block 11 of Coast Guard Institute Form 4147, Application for Off-Duty Assistance, with instructions for each required applicant response.*

11. ENROLLMENT INFORMATION																	
COURSE		COURSE TITLE	COURSE LEVEL					UNIT			TUITION COSTS		DATE				
			HIGH SCHOOL	CERT	DIV		GRAD	HOURS			PER UNIT	PER COURSE	STARTED			COMPLETED	
DEPT.	NO.				L	U		#	S/Q	CLK			YR	MO	DA	YR	MO	DA
A	B	C		D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	Class start date			Class end date	

A   Department name (ECON, HUM, MTH, etc.)

B   Course No. (1106, 1102, 456, etc.)

C   Name of course (English I, West Civ I, etc.)

D   Vocational course credit

E   Lower-level courses (0100, 1000, 200, etc.)

F   Upper-level courses (300, 400)

G   Graduate-level courses (500, 600)

H   No. of credit hours (i.e. 3,4)

I   S for semester, Q for quarter hour credit

J   Clock hour credit

K   Cost of tuition per credit hour

L   Total tuition per course

ESO corner

Welcome to the ESO Corner. My name is ENS Kevin Hill. Part of my job as the Voluntary Education assistant division chief is to serve as a link between unit education services officers and the programs available in the Voluntary Education department.

A little background about myself: I entered the Coast Guard in 1995 and served four years as an aviation electronics technician at Air Station North Bend. Thanks to the guidance and support of my ESO, supervisors and co-workers, I completed various exams and independent study courses toward a degree. Shortly after earning a degree, I attended officer candidate school. So it's now time for me to turn the table around and help others to complete their degrees.

The Institute's Voluntary Education Department provides active duty, active-duty reservists, and civilian employees and their spouses with credit assessments, degree plans and official transcripts. The link between these individuals and VE is their unit or group ESO.

To benefit new and seasoned ESOs, the ESO Corner was created with a primarily focus on topics for the ESO. However, it will touch on topics that any one pursuing a degree may benefit from. Some of the topics that will be covered in the ESO Corner during my tenure include:

■ College Level Examination Program tips and procedures.

■ Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support program and exam procedures.

■ American Council on Education program guidelines and procedures.

■ Simple assessment guidelines and procedures.

■ Basic degree plan tips for the ESO.

■ Degree counseling

The Coast Guard relies heavily on each ESO for the educational development of its members. As an ESO you have a tremendous responsibility to learn how to serve your members to the fullest. To assist you, as an ESO, please become very familiar with the Institute's web site and what it offers. The link is www.uscg.mil/hq/cgi/index.htm.

The Voluntary Education portion of the Institute's web site includes information about how to obtain a degree, how to fund the degree, how many credits are granted for Coast Guard training courses, and much more. It also has downloadable forms to complete and send in.

Members: Because of the high volume of phone calls and an ever-increasing demand for the voluntary education services, we request that members contact their unit ESO regarding their personal questions and situations.

ESOs: Please direct your unit member related questions to me at khill@cginstitute.uscg.mil or by phone to 405-954-7240

Keep your eyes open for the next ESO corner where the CLEP program and exams will be highlighted.

Mutual Assistance Supplemental Education Grant

The Coast Guard Mutual Assistance Supplemental Education Grant Program offers financial assistance by reimbursing certain costs associated with seeking a first undergraduate (associate's and/or bachelor's) degree, a vocational and technical training (VoTech) certificate, or a general equivalency diploma, not otherwise covered by Coast Guard tuition assistance or similar programs.

Unfortunately, a decline in available funds, brought on by a large increase in assistance across the board over the last two years, combined with reduced returns on investments, made it necessary to cap this program at the current level. This is necessary to ensure that CGMA retains its ability to meet the most critical financial needs of its members.

Based on current use rate, funding for the Supplemental Education Grant Program is expected to run out before the end of the year. People interested in a SEG are reminded that this grant is subject to the availability of funds each calendar year and is offered on a first-come, first-served basis. Applicants are advised to submit their SEG applications to their local Mutual Assistance representative as soon as possible.

For more information, see ALCOAST 246/01, or visit CGMA web site, www.cgmahq.org, or by calling CGMA-HQ at 1-800-881-2462.

10-DAY RULE FOR TA APPLICATIONS

ESOs please be aware that Commandant Instruction 1500.24 of March 9, 2000, requires that tuition assistance requests (CG Form 4147) be received 10 days before the start date of the class. The Institute follows this policy, and requests that are not received within this 10-day window will not be processed. Please ensure that all personnel at your unit are aware of this policy.

In situations in which the member could not apply because of mission requirements or personal hardships, submit a letter with the CG4147 stating the situation and requesting a waiver of this policy. Additionally, if the institution will accept the TA authorization after the start date of the class, provide a statement to that effect from the institution. The letter will be kept on file at the Institute and future notification will not be required.

for individual courses. Many institutions limit the number and kinds of alternative delivery or nontraditional credit they will accept. If you wish to apply the credit earned to a degree program, be sure to consult with the institution awarding the degree before enrolling in a distance learning course.

External degree benefits

A number of delivery options provide choices and flexibility. Options include

- Internet-based courses
- Fax
- Video
- Electronic mail
- Computer conferencing
- CD-ROM

With traditional correspondence courses, students rely on pen, paper and textbooks. Correspondence instruction is the workhorse of distance delivery, and for some, is the best alternative. When using some of the newer technologies, students can use audiotapes, cable, satellite or videos to view lessons in the comfort of their homes or workplaces. Other students may enroll in programs supported by voice mail and phone conferences with instructors. Some programs will rely heavily on computers, using computer bulletin boards and computer-conferencing via the Internet for time- and place-independent communication among students and instructors.

If you need only individual courses, you can choose from the schools listed in the DANTES External Degree Catalog or the DANTES Independent Study Catalog to meet certain program prerequisites, accelerate a degree completion plan or prepare for a second career.

Before beginning an external degree program, DANTES rec-

ommends that you consider numerous personal characteristics that may influence your success in the program. These include your maturity, conflicting job requirements, family responsibilities, goals, independence, tendency to procrastinate, persistence, patience, self-confidence, writing ability, and available library or subject matter support.

Selecting an external degree

- Consider your long-term goal. Are you meeting military requirements or planning for a civilian job? Are you merely seeking a degree or do you have a degree or school in mind with a highly recognizable name?
- Consider total tuition and maintenance fees.
- Is it important to you that the school awards credit for job training/experience and credit-by-exam?
- How will you be affected by the school's credit transfer policies, such as fees charged for evaluation, the number of years since the transferred courses were completed or the maximum amount of transfer credit allowed by the school?
- Does the school's mode of delivery meet your requirements and capabilities? Do you have a modem, VCR, or computer if one is required? If instruction is delivered using advanced technology, be sure your equipment will accommodate it.
- If the school has an on-campus residency requirement, will your job, family, and finances accommodate it?
- If you plan to use VA benefits, is the program VA-approved? Clarify with the school whether the program is VA-approved for regular part-time VA benefits. The rules governing in-service VA benefitsdiffer in some cases from the rules governing benefits for veterans.
- Do the school's services meet

your needs; for example, toll free number, fax, E-mail, quick turn around on assignments and provision of transcripts, single source for books, etc.?

Devising an external degree plan

- Define your goal. Don't start with random courses unless you know they'll count toward your degree or you need them for other knowledge purposes.
- Understand your school's requirements as described in the school's catalog. Get one and read it. Information on the school's web site is always helpful but may not include all the information found in the school's catalog.
- Ask the school to evaluate all credits already earned, including credits listed on an official transcript provided by the Institute.
- Obtain a degree plan from the school based on the above evaluation.
- Are there any additional exams that will satisfy the remaining degree requirements (CLEP, DSST, etc.)?